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Taiwanese Students Bring Fierce Rivalries To U.S. Campuses

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Some Say Spies From Taipei
Follow Their Every Move;
Threats, Trials, Jail Terms

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Last June, Chen Wen-cheng, a professor at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, returned to his native Taiwan to visit his parents. During his visit he was summoned to an interview by the Taiwan Garrison Command, one of the country's internal-security agencies. Shortly after a 13-hour interrogation, the body of the 31-year-old professor was found at the base of a building on the campus of National Taiwan University in Taipei.

That much is undisputed fact. The cause of the professor's death, however, is a topic of considerable controversy. According to press reports in Taiwan at the time, the Taiwanese government said that Prof. Chen was escorted safely home by its agents following the interview and only after that either jumped or fell from the sixth-floor balcony of the campus building. But the professor's family and friends maintain that he was murdered by government agents; what's more, they say the murder was in retaliation for Prof. Chen's dissident activities, which, they add, were reported to Taipei by government spies on the Carnegie-Mellon campus.

Richard Cyert, Carnegie-Mellon's president, isn't sure who is responsible for his faculty member's death. In September, largely at his own expense, he dispatched a pathologist and a CMU professor to Taipei, but their investigation concluded only that Prof. Chen was a homicide victim. Nonetheless, Mr. Cyert sent a stiffly worded telegram to Chiang Ching-kuo, Taiwan's president, deploring the surveillance of Taiwanese students in the U.S. He also established a hot line enabling CMU's several hundred Taiwanese students to report anonymously any threats they receive.

Acts of Vandalism

U.S. colleges and universities currently enroll some 20,000 students from Taiwan. It is a group that is divided; and the division, aggravated by incidents such as the death of Prof. Chen, has recently gone beyond the political disputes that occasionally crop up in many foreign-student communities. Instead of debates and demonstrations, there have been acts of vandalism and charges of harassment and surveillance by foreign agents on U.S. campuses. U.S. Congressmen have even gotten involved, some of them saying that what is happening among the Taiwanese students here raises questions about future U.S. relations with the Taipei government.

The dispute dates from 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang, or KMT, party were forced off mainland China by the Communists. Chiang's followers fled to nearby Taiwan and, though a minority, took control of the island. But many Taiwanese natives, most of whom were close ethnic cousins of the mainlanders, came to resent the KMT dominance and particularly the imposition of martial law (which remains in effect today).

As the years went by, the children of the two groups—the KMT adherents calling themselves Chinese; the others, Taiwanese—continued the feud. Some exported it when they came to the U.S. to complete their university education. Since the 1960s, students from Taiwan enrolled at Cornell, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California, the University of Michigan and dozens of other schools have complained of spying and harassment by fellow students (the Chinese faction) who allegedly draw Taiwanese government pay for their activities.

Prison Sentence

Those who believe that they have been spied upon contend that information about what they say, what they read and with whom they associate is sent back to Taipei. They further maintain that, based on such reports, the Taiwanese government has tried some former U.S. students for sedition and denied passports and visas to others, forcing them back home.

Some mention the case of Rita Yeh, formerly a student at the University of Minnesota. Miss Yeh is currently serving a 14-year prison sentence in Taiwan. During her trial on charges of spying for the People's Republic of China, the prosecutor reportedly introduced evidence that was gathered at the Minnesota campus.

Ivan Wang, a spokesman for the Taiwan government, says: "My government has neither the intent nor the means to spy on more than 60,000 Chinese students, scholars or professionals from Taiwan, who are either studying or settling in (the U.S.)." As for charges that the government harasses dissident students, Mr. Wang says, "If they aren't doing anything related to the overthrow of their country, they have nothing to fear."

Caught in the middle, U.S. university officials say there is little they can do in the absence of proof that a crime was committed on their campuses. "It's very difficult to actually prove or disprove that there is Kuomintang surveillance," says C. Peter McGrath, the president of the University of Minnesota, which has a large student population from Taiwan. "I'm very concerned that there is a climate of intimidation and I've made exhortations, but I don't know what good they do."

If nothing else, the death of Carnegie-Mellon's Prof. Chen heightened the tension between the two student groups. Prior to his last visit to Taipei, the professor had allegedly been involved in raising money for *Formosa* magazine, a publication in Taiwan that advocates an end to martial law, more

democracy, and better economic and political opportunities for the native Taiwanese majority on the island. Such ideas get a receptive hearing from many Taiwanese when they arrive in this country.

"Compared to where they've come from, Taiwanese students in the U.S. suddenly find themselves in a free atmosphere," explains Donald Sutton, a Carnegie-Mellon professor and specialist in Chinese history. "Inevitably they talk about politics and some of that talk is anti-government."

But on some campuses, the professor's death precipitated more than talk. At Ohio State University, several cars belonging to pro-Kuomintang students were daubed with sulphuric acid soon after news of the teacher's fate circulated. Posters appeared demanding that KMT "spies" leave campus, and an article in a student newspaper quoted anonymous Taiwanese students who blamed their government for Mr. Chen's death.

Fang Wei-chou, the president of the pro-government Chinese Students Association at Ohio State, blames anti-government Taiwanese for the vandalism. University police haven't found the culprits, but when Mr. Fang organized a group to send a letter to the student paper supporting the government of Taiwan, Ohio State officials acted. Mr. Fang says he and other leaders of the rival groups were called to a meeting at which university officials told them that vandalism and other violations of the student code could result in expulsion.

The professor's death also had repercussions in the U.S. House of Representatives. At a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing called last October to investigate possible illegal activities by Taiwan's agents in the U.S., Rep. Jim Leach, an Iowa Republican, called Prof. Chen's death "one of the most unfortunate incidents to occur in the recent history of U.S.-Taiwan relations." The Congressman is one of several in the House who blame the Chiang Ching-kuo government for spying on U.S. campuses; and he sought, unsuccessfully, to block the sale of U.S. arms to Taiwan until that government assured the U.S. that campus spying in this country was stopped.

Rep. Leach also criticized the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for declining his call to investigate Prof. Chen's death and to look into the question of student spies. The department had responded that it and the FBI weren't responsible for investigating such matters.

Law-enforcement agencies are interested, however, in keeping tabs on some of the more radical factions on the fringes of the two groups. One such faction goes beyond the anti-KMT sentiments of many Taiwanese and advocates the overthrow of the island government. It is that group that is suspected by California authorities of carrying out a wave of bombings in the Los Angeles area nearly two years ago.